

## Repeat blooming cultivars

Miniature dwarf	Ditto (cream and maroon bicolor)
Standard dwarf iris	Baby Blessed (light yellow), Jewel Baby (deep purple), Plum Wine (plum red with violet shading), Refined (pale yellow), Sun Doll (yellow)
Intermediate iris	Blessed Again (light yellow), I Bless (cream, flowers nearly all summer), Honey Glazed (pale yellow standards with mustard-yellow falls), Low Ho Silver (silvery white)
Border iris	Double Up (blue and white bicolor with dark violet borders), Ultra Echo (lavender with violet)
Tall iris	Bountiful Harvest (white and purple), Champagne Elegance (white and pink bicolor, ruffled petals), Clarence (white with violet falls), Feed Back (medium blue-violet), Eternal Bliss (violet with tangerine falls), Late Lilac (lilac), Immortality (white, may rebloom up to three times), Misty Twilight (pale violet-blue), Pink Attraction (ruffled pale pink), Queen Dorothy (white, stitched with violet edges, nearly an everbloomer), Silver Dividends (white), Suky (violet with white zones), Summer Olympics (light yellow), Violet Music (violet), Zurich (white with yellow beards).

## Growth habit

Iris have thick, fleshy, underground stems (called rhizomes) that store food produced by the sword-shaped, semi-evergreen leaves. The rhizomes grow best when planted at or slightly below the soil surface with feeder roots penetrating the soil below.

Each year underground offsets develop from the original rhizome. Buds produce a large fan of leaves and several flower stalks. Success with iris depends on keeping the rhizomes firm and healthy. In general, this is done by providing the rhizome good drainage while the feeder roots below remain moist but not wet.

## Site Selection and Preparation

A full sun exposure is preferred; however, some of the delicate pink and blue iris hold their color better in partial shade. Excessive shade will reduce or prevent flowering. Good soil drainage is essential to prevent rhizomes from rotting. It may be necessary to plant the rhizomes in raised beds (at least 6 inches high) to obtain proper drainage.

Iris will grow in many soil types but a light, loamy soil with a pH of 6 to 7 that has been amended with organic matter is preferred. A tight clay soil may keep the rhizome too wet and should have organic matter (pine bark, compost) incorporated to improve drainage. Manure is not usually recommended for iris but can be used if well-rotted and incorporated at least 6 inches deep into the bed (should not come in contact with rhizomes).

Fertilization of iris is important to obtain best results, but must be done in moderation. Nitrogen, potash, and phosphorus are essential for iris, but excessive nitrogen promotes lush growth that is more susceptible to rot diseases. At planting, incorporate  $\frac{1}{2}$  pound of a low nitrogen fertilizer such as 5-10-10 per 50 ft<sup>2</sup> (1  $\frac{1}{2}$  oz per 10 ft<sup>2</sup>). Taking and following the results of a soil test is the preferred method to determine fertilizer amounts.

## Planting

The best time to plant bearded iris is July through September. This will allow them to become well established before winter. Container-grown iris can be planted in the spring. In a well-prepared bed, dig a shallow hole large enough to accommodate the rhizome or clump of rhizomes. Form a mound of soil in the center for the planting base. Make the mound high enough so the top of the rhizome is slightly above soil level. Spread the roots around the mound, fill with soil, and water. For a mass of color, plant at least three rhizomes (spaced 8 to 10 inches apart) or plant undivided clumps; point each fan of leaves away from the center of the group. Clumps should be spaced 18 inches apart. Mulch should be applied to fall-planted iris to reduce heaving during the winter.

## Care and Maintenance

Before flowering, water plants often enough to keep the soil moist but not wet. Reblooming iris should be watered during the summer, while spring-flowering iris will tolerate drought. After flowers fade, cut flower stalks back to an inch or two above the rhizome to prevent seed formation. Plants that are growing well (good green foliage) may not need fertilizing. If you fertilize, apply  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of 5-10-10 fertilizer per iris clump after flowering. Fertilizer can burn the rhizomes; it should be applied around but not directly on them. Reblooming iris should be fertilized in the spring as new growth begins and after spring flowering ends. Iris respond to shallow (1 to 2 inches) cultivation and should not be mulched. In early fall, cut leaves 6 to 8 inches from the ground, especially if foliage disease occurs.